United Nations

Press Release

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

◆ Today, for the second year, the world community observes World Population Day.

◆ The Special Committee against Apartheid expresses regret at "the premature lifting by the United States of sanctions against South Africa"; and calls the decision of the International Olympic Committee to readmit South South Africa "premature".

◆ According to the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), continuous torrential rainfall is causing severe flooding, death and deterioration in the Anhui, Henan and Jiangsu provinces of China.

◆ Memorandum of Understanding concerning role of new International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, signed in Vienna by the Government of Canada and United Nations.

◆ Japan grants UNWRA $7.2 million for purchase of flour for Palestinian refugees.

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Today, for the second year, the world community observed World Population Day. The observance is an outgrowth of the "Day of Five Billion", marked in July 1987, when the world population count reached the 5 billion mark.

In a message released for the occasion, Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, stressed that "rapid population growth, with mounting poverty, the alarming depletion of natural resources, damage to the environment, migratory pressures, burgeoning cities, and unmet needs in education, health, employment and housing, threatens the present and future quality of life on our planet".

"We can reverse or at least slow these trends", she said. "Slower, more balanced population growth has a positive impact on the environment, the economy and the social development of every nation."

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The world population now stands at 5.4 billion and a billion more people will be added by the year 2001. Statistics gathered by the United Nations indicate that, in spite of expected fertility declines, the population of the less developed regions of the world may nearly double during the next 40 years. During that period, the elderly population of the less developed regions is projected to increase at an annual rate of 3 per cent per year, more than tripling their number. However, children will still comprise three quarters of the dependent population of the less developed regions in the year 2025.

More than 100 countries, as well as numerous non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, communities, schools, groups and individuals were expected to observe the day with planned events including special television, film and radio programmes; speeches and rallies by prominent Government and community leaders; seminars and workshops on population issues; newspaper and magazine supplements; special publications and exhibits; press conferences; sports competitions; skits on family planning and other dramatic and artistic performances.

"Planned Families, Better Lives", a film produced for the United Nations Population Fund, was to be shown on national television networks around the world.

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The Acting Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, Marjorie R. Thorpe, of Trinidad and Tobago, and the members of the Committee issued a statement today expressing regret at "the premature lifting by the United States Government of sanctions against South Africa, provided for in the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986".

The statement recalled that "the international community, including the United States, in December of 1989, adopted by consensus the United Nations Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa which sets out the steps to be taken by the South African authorities before any relaxation of existing measures should be undertaken".

While recognizing that progress towards the abolition of apartheid had to be acknowledged, the Special Committee stated that "the climate conducive to negotiations and to free political activity does not yet exist in South Africa, that violence is still pervasive, that all exiles have not been allowed to return in safety and dignity and all political prisoners have not been released".

The Special Committee expressed hope that "the United States will continue to exert every possible pressure on the South African authorities so that all conditions stipulated by the United Nations Declaration on South Africa are met".

In a related development, the Special Committee has called the decision of the International Olympic Committee to readmit South Africa "premature".

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In a statement issued through its Acting Chairman, the Committee said it had learned of the decision which allows South Africa to participate in the Olymic Games to be held in Barcelona, Spain, in 1992, or possibly the Winter Games in Albertville, France, in February 1992, "with surprise".

Observing that all sports organizations and federations as well as activities and facilities had not yet been desegregated, the Committee said that, while recognizing that progress towards abolishing apartheid was to be acknowledged, it none the less felt that there were still steps, recognized by the IOC itself, that needed to be taken to open the way to lift the sports boycott. Those included concrete steps towards the unification of all South African sports on a non-racial basis; the availability of South African sports facilities to all South Africans and effective action to develop and train athletes of all races.

The statement indicated that the Commission against Apartheid in Sports had scheduled a meeting to review the sports boycott at United Nations Headquarters from 10 to 13 September. It was expected that many interested parties, including the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa, would attend.

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According to a report from the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), torrential rainfall is causing severe flooding, death and widespread deterioration in the Anhui, Henan and Jiangsu provinces of China.

A United Nations spokeswoman said preliminary Government reports indicated casualties and material damage including 328 dead, 2,375 wounded, a total affected population of over 100 million persons, of whom 5.3 million had been cut off by flood waters.

The report cited economic losses of some 16.8 billion yuan or $1.3 billion. The UNDRO also reported on the loss of 6.9 million hectares of agricultural crops, as well as severe damage to houses, 529,000 of which had collapsed and more than 1 million had been seriously damaged.

The Chinese Government has launched a formal appeal to the international community for relief assistance to the flood victims in view of the unprecedented damage, and has outlined a provisional list of relief needs including tents, blankets, trucks, boats, medicines and building materials.

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In Vienna, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Canada and the United Nations was signed today on the role of the new International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy established in Vancouver on 1 February.

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Signing the Memorandum were Edward G. Lee, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations (Vienna), and Margaret J. Anstee, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna.

The Centre's aim is to support the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, thus contributing to international cooperation in the development and reform of criminal law.

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The Government of Japan has donated 1,000 million yen (about $7.2 million) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to purchase and distribute flour to Palestine refugees.

Tetsuya Endo, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations in Vienna, and UNRWA Commissioner-General Ilter Turkmen exchanged letters outlining the agreement at UNRWA headquarters on Tuesday, 9 July.

The grant will cover the purchase of approximately 29,000 tons of flour, which will be distributed to some 36,400 Palestine refugee families (about 156,400 persons) registered with UNRWA as special hardship cases in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

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